

# Snow Scenes



Painting snowy landscapes presents a number of challenges to plein air painters, beginning with the fact that the outdoor temperatures are low and can make it difficult for cold fingers to manipulate stiff or frozen paint. Then there is an issue of mixing a range of whites or reserving sections of watercolor paper in ways that convey the depth of the scene, the warmth or coolness of the colors, and the stark contrast in values.

“We naturally tend to think of snow as being only white because the local color or value of snow is white,” says Utah artist George W. Handrahan. “However, it takes on many other colors as influenced by reflected light or shadows, with only the highlights actually being a warm or cool white. Pushing or exaggerating these colors can make a winter painting more interesting.” 🖼️

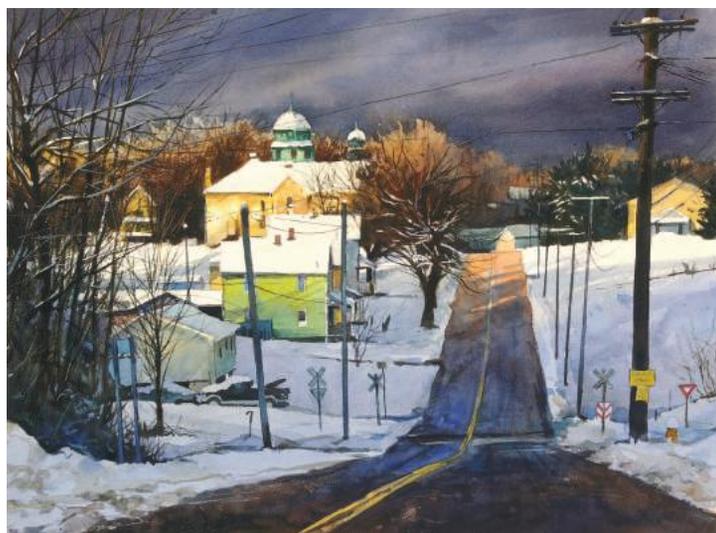
**Cold Morning — Warm Light**  
 George W. Handrahan  
 2008, oil on linen, 12 x 16 in.  
 Collection Cam & Cindy Eggerts  
 Plein air

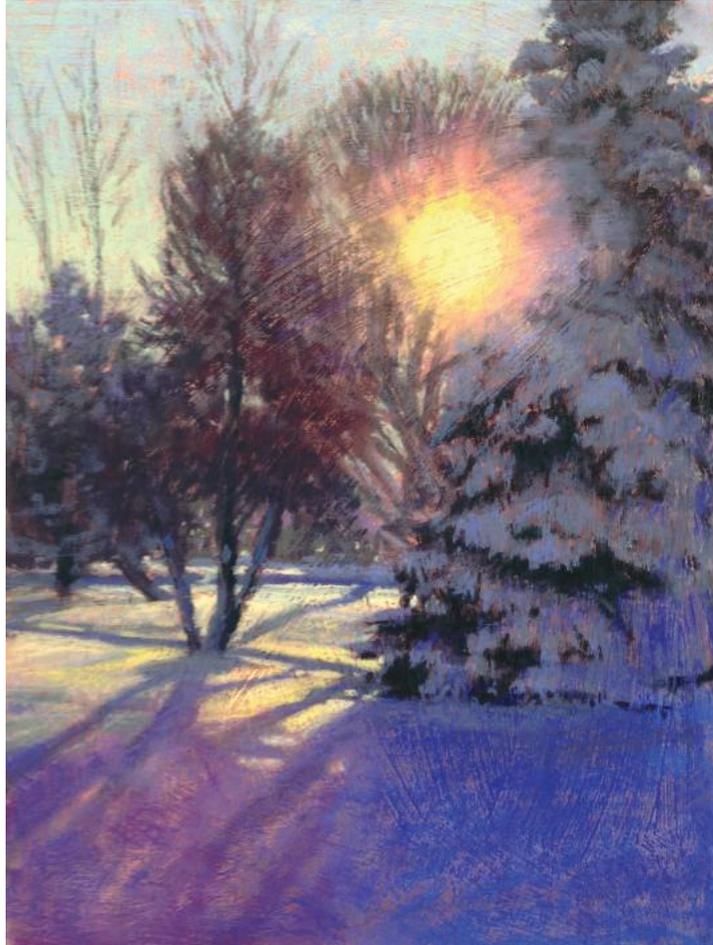


**Cold in New Hampshire** (above)  
 Stephen Gary Frisk  
 2015, oil on linen panel, 16 x 20 in.  
 Private collection  
 Plein air

**Winter Vista**  
 Christopher Leeper  
 2017, watercolor, 21 x 29 in.  
 Collection the artist  
 Studio

**Miners Creek**  
 Susan McCullough  
 2017, oil, 14 x 18 in.  
 Collection the artist  
 Plein air





**Wintering**  
Jill Stefani Wagner  
2016, pastel, 16 x 12 in.  
Collection the artist  
Studio

**Stillness of Winter**  
Brienne Brown  
2016, watercolor on paper, 10 x 14 in.  
Collection the artist  
Plein air

*"Some people ask me why I even try to paint watercolors in the winter and deal with the cold, freezing paint, and less-than-ideal drying conditions," says Brienne Brown. "I do it because the best experiences — and the worst — were in the winter. I have to dress warmly and add vodka to my water to prevent it from freezing."*



**Wyoming Winter**  
Carol Swinney  
2017, oil on canvas, 12 x 24 in.  
Private collection  
Studio





**A Winter Tale**

*Suzanne Morris*  
2017, oil on linen panel, 9 x 12 in.  
Private collection  
Plein air

*"I was interested in the warmth of the reeds and small tree in the mid-ground contrasted against the cold snow and background evergreen trees," says Suzanne Morris.*



**Winter Creek**

*Peter Campbell*  
2017, oil on canvas, 18 x 24 in.  
Collection the artist  
Plein air & studio



**Last of the Snow**

*Ed Cooper*  
2017, oil, 24 x 36 in.  
Collection the artist  
Studio



**20 Below**

Steven Gerhartz  
2017, oil on canvas, 30 x 48 in.  
Courtesy the Gallery of  
Wisconsin Art, West Bend, WI  
Plein air



**Night Lights**

George W. Handrahan  
2015, oil on panel, 16 x 20 in.  
Private collection  
Plein air

"When painting a snow scene," Handrahan says, "I like to gray the snow a bit and tint it with color so when I place the highlights they pop. Also, I think it's important to contrast the cool of the snow with warm light or objects. The ambient temperature can also affect how the snow receives and reflects light. Cold snow is generally 'dry' and powdery smaller flakes, with a more even, soft surface that diffuses reflected light. Warm snow has a larger, icy 'snow cone' texture that is uneven and absorbs more light. As the surface of snow is generally soft with rounded forms, I paint it with soft transitions and avoid hard edges, cast shadows and solid objects being the exception."